The trilemma of omnipotence, omniscience and temporal reality

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Abstract

This paper develops a formal argument demonstrating that the classical theistic attributes of absolute omniscience and absolute omnipotence cannot be jointly instantiated in any universe with temporal structure. Using a branching-time model enriched with operators for divine knowledge and divine causal power, the paper shows that omniscience entails the settledness of future-tense propositions, whereas omnipotence entails their openness. When combined with temporal reality, these attributes impose incompatible modal statuses on the same future event. The result is a strict contradiction that does not depend on creaturely freedom, epistemic conditions, or causal interpretations of foreknowledge; it emerges directly from the factivity of knowledge, the modal implications of unrestricted divine power, and the existence of temporal succession.

Classical responses; timelessness, non-causal foreknowledge, Molinist middle knowledge, open futurism, soft fact distinctions, and appeals to a divine power transcending logic, are examined and shown to be insufficient. Each preserves the structural features that generate the inconsistency or abandons one of the central commitments. The analysis yields a trilemma: any coherent model must reject at least one of the following; absolute omniscience, absolute omnipotence, or temporal reality. The result has significant implications for perfect being theology, the metaphysics of time, and the coherence conditions of divine attributes. No classical configuration permits all three commitments simultaneously; at least one requires substantive revision.

Introduction

The classical theistic tradition attributes to God both absolute omniscience and absolute omnipotence. Omniscience is typically understood as knowledge of all truths, including propositions about future contingent events, and omnipotence as the unrestricted ability to bring about any logically possible state of affairs. These attributes are normally taken to be mutually reinforcing: only a being of unlimited power could sustain complete knowledge of the world, and only a being of complete knowledge could wield unlimited power effectively. The coherence of the classical conception of God is frequently assumed rather than demonstrated.

This paper examines whether these attributes can, in fact, be jointly instantiated in any temporally structured reality. The analysis does not presuppose any particular doctrine of creation, moral theory, or theory of creaturely free will. Instead, it focuses on the logical and modal relations among three commitments: that God possesses infallible knowledge of all truth-valued propositions, that God retains unrestricted causal alternatives regarding future events, and that the world exhibits temporal succession in which some moments are epistemically and causally prior to others.

The central question is straightforward. If God knows at an earlier time that a contingent event will occur at a later time, can God at that earlier time still bring about the negation of that event? The answer depends on the modal profile assigned to propositions about the future. If God's knowledge is factive and infallible, the proposition describing the event must be true. If omnipotence includes genuine alternative possibilities, the corresponding

proposition must remain open. In a temporally ordered world, these conditions must obtain at the same temporal index. The result is the tension at the core of this paper.

The argument developed here establishes that the classical package, absolute omniscience, absolute omnipotence, and temporal reality, is internally inconsistent. The inconsistency does not arise from the existence of free agents, from the epistemic structure of prediction, or from semantic disputes about future contingents. Nor does it depend on any particular doctrine of divine simplicity, modal realism, or theological voluntarism. The contradiction originates solely from the formal interaction of infallible knowledge, unrestricted alternative possibilities, and temporal succession. As such, it is independent of the free will debate and applies even in a universe containing no creatures at all.

The analysis proceeds by constructing a formal model of time, possibility, and divine attributes using a branching-time semantics augmented with operators for divine knowledge and divine power. This framework allows the modal consequences of omniscience and omnipotence to be made explicit. Omniscience requires that future-tense propositions describing events that will occur be settled relative to earlier times. Omnipotence requires that the same propositions remain open relative to those earlier times. Temporal reality ensures that there exists a time at which both constraints must apply. Together, these generate a contradiction in the truth conditions governing propositions about future events.

The result is a trilemma: at least one of the following must be revised or rejected; absolute omniscience, absolute omnipotence, or temporal reality. The paper examines each limb of this trilemma and considers the implications of adopting it. It also evaluates the classical strategies proposed to reconcile foreknowledge and divine action, including Boethian timelessness, Thomistic eternalism, Molinist middle knowledge, open futurism, and non-causal interpretations of foreknowledge. None succeeds in preserving the classical configuration of attributes without sacrificing one of its core commitments.

The purpose of this paper is not to defend any particular theological view but to provide a rigorous modal analysis of the traditional divine attributes and their logical compatibility. While the result imposes constraints on perfect being theology and the metaphysics of divine action, it does not presuppose any normative conclusion about which attribute should be revised. The aim is descriptive rather than prescriptive: to clarify the space of coherent theological possibilities and to identify where classical theism, as traditionally formulated, cannot be maintained without modification.

The remainder of the paper develops this argument in detail. It introduces the conceptual background needed to articulate the modal profiles of divine attributes, constructs the formal framework in which the contradiction arises, presents the main theorem and its proof, evaluates major responses in the literature, and maps the trilemma and its metaphysical consequences. The conclusion summarizes the implications for the coherence of classical theism and for future work in analytic philosophy of religion.

Background and Conceptual Foundations

Any examination of the compatibility between omniscience, omnipotence, and temporal reality requires clear definitions of the relevant concepts and the modal commitments they entail. Classical theism has traditionally understood divine attributes in ways that impose strong logical, epistemic, and metaphysical constraints. These constraints must be articulated precisely in order to investigate whether they are jointly satisfiable.

The first commitment concerns divine omniscience. In the classical tradition, omniscience is defined as the possession of complete and infallible knowledge of all truths. This includes propositions concerning past, present, and future events. Two features of this definition are central. First, knowledge is factive: if God knows that p, then p is true. Second, omniscience is not restricted to propositions whose truth-values are epistemically accessible to finite agents; it encompasses all propositions that have truth-values, including those describing future

contingent events. These conditions ensure that omniscience is an absolute epistemic attribute rather than an indexical one.

The second commitment concerns divine omnipotence. Classical omnipotence is typically defined as the ability to bring about any logically possible state of affairs. This includes the ability to bring about either E or not-E for any contingent future event E. Omnipotence therefore imposes modal openness on future-tense propositions: if an event is contingent, then both its occurrence and its non-occurrence must remain within the scope of divine power prior to its realization. The notion of "unrestricted causal alternatives" is essential to the classical conception of divine agency. A deity whose future actions are modally necessary relative to earlier times would no longer be omnipotent in the classical sense.

The third commitment is temporal reality. A temporally structured world exhibits a distinction between earlier and later moments and supports the possibility of genuine change. In such a world, the future is not merely a logical abstraction but a domain in which events come to pass after times at which they are not yet actual. This temporal ordering allows propositions about future events to be meaningfully evaluated relative to earlier times. Temporal reality therefore provides the structure in which the modal requirements of omniscience and omnipotence must jointly operate. Without such structure, the relation between divine knowledge and divine power would not involve the temporal asymmetry that generates the conflict examined in this paper.

A fourth concept, implicit in the first, is the factivity of knowledge. Factivity ensures that propositions known by God must correspond to the actual state of affairs. There are no "true for God" propositions or epistemic approximations; knowledge is identical with truth. This constraint, trivial in everyday epistemology, has significant modal consequences when applied to future-tense propositions. If God knows at an earlier time that E will occur, then E must occur. This necessity does not arise from causation but from the nature of knowledge itself.

These commitments generate two competing modal profiles for future-tense propositions. If they are known by an infallible knower, they must be true and therefore settled. If they fall within the range of divine causal power, they must remain open. A temporally structured world requires that these modal statuses apply at specific antecedent times. The central question is whether both statuses can apply to the same proposition at the same temporal index. The remainder of the paper shows that they cannot.

A final conceptual ingredient is the metaphysics of the future. Philosophical theories of the future differ on whether future contingent propositions possess determinate truth-values. Some maintain that the future is ontologically open until events occur. Others maintain that the future is fully determinate even if epistemically inaccessible. The argument developed here does not presuppose any particular stance on this issue; instead, it examines the truth conditions forced by the commitments of omniscience and omnipotence themselves. Even if one begins with an indeterministic metaphysics, divine foreknowledge imposes determinate truth-values on future contingents. Even if one begins with a deterministic metaphysics, divine power requires modal alternatives contrary to those truths. Any such commitments, when combined with temporal ordering, give rise to the inconsistency demonstrated later.

These foundational clarifications set the stage for the development of a formal model in which the interaction of omniscience, omnipotence, and temporality can be precisely examined. The next section constructs this model using a branching-time semantics supplemented with operators for divine knowledge and divine power. The purpose of this framework is not to impose a particular metaphysical theory of time but to provide a neutral formal environment in which the modal consequences of classical theistic attributes can be explicitly derived.

Formal Framework

To evaluate the compatibility of omniscience, omnipotence, and temporal reality, it is necessary to articulate a precise model of time, modality, and divine attributes. The framework adopted here is a

branching-time semantics augmented with operators representing divine knowledge and divine causal power. This approach is neutral with respect to broader metaphysical questions about determinism, causation, or the ontology of possible worlds; its purpose is simply to make explicit the modal consequences that follow from the classical definitions of divine attributes.

The temporal structure consists of a nonempty set of times ordered by an irreflexive, transitive "earlier than" relation. A history is defined as a maximal linearly ordered subset of these times. Histories represent complete ways the world could unfold from past to future. Temporal reality is represented by the existence of at least one branching point: a time at which two distinct histories coincide up to that point and diverge thereafter. This provides the context in which propositions about future events may be open relative to earlier times.

Truth-values are assigned at pairs consisting of a time and a history. A proposition concerning an event at a later time may have different truth-values on different histories. When a proposition has the same truth-value across all histories that share a given past, it is said to be settled relative to that earlier time. When its truth-value differs across such histories, it is open relative to that time. This distinction is essential for representing the modal profiles imposed by omniscience and omnipotence.

The divine attributes are represented by two modal operators. The first is an epistemic operator expressing divine knowledge. The operator is factive: if the operator applies to a proposition at a given time, the proposition is true at all pairs consisting of that time and any history agreeing with the actual history up to that time. This reflects the infallibility of divine knowledge. The operator ranges over all truth-valued propositions, including those describing future contingent events.

The second operator represents divine causal power. It expresses that God has the capacity, at a given time, to bring about a state of affairs at a later time. This operator is interpreted in terms of the existence of a history agreeing with the actual history up to the earlier time but differing at the later time in the way specified by the proposition. The operator therefore requires that the proposition remain open at the earlier time: if the proposition were settled, there would be no distinct history available for the exercise of divine causal alternatives.

The resulting framework highlights the modal consequences of the classical definitions. If God knows at an earlier time that an event will occur at a later time, then the proposition describing that event is settled at the earlier time. If God retains unrestricted causal alternatives regarding the event, then the proposition remains open at the earlier time. Temporal reality ensures that the future lies at a temporal distance from the point at which both attributes must operate. The conflict arises when the same proposition is required to be both settled and open relative to the same temporal index.

No additional metaphysical assumptions about the nature of possibility, the structure of causal relations, or the semantics of tense logic are required. The model serves only to make explicit the logical demands each divine attribute imposes on propositions about the future. Once these demands are clearly articulated, the inconsistency at the heart of the classical view becomes apparent. The following section states and proves the central theorem deriving this inconsistency.

The Central Theorem and Proof

The formal framework developed above makes it possible to express precisely the demands that omniscience and omnipotence impose on propositions concerning future events. Omniscience requires that such propositions be settled at earlier times if they are true. Omnipotence requires that such propositions be open at those same times if they concern contingent events within the scope of divine causal alternatives. Temporal reality guarantees that there exist earlier times relative to which the truth of later events is evaluated. The central theorem of this paper establishes that these requirements cannot all be satisfied simultaneously within any branching-time model.

Let the actual history be denoted by h_0. Let E be any contingent event that occurs at a later time t_2 on h_0.

Let t_1 be an earlier time, $t_1 < t_2$, such that the histories h_0 and h' share all times up to t_1 but diverge thereafter. Such a time exists by the assumption of temporal reality. Consider the proposition p that E occurs at t_2.

Divine omniscience requires that if p is true on the actual history h_0, then God knows p at all earlier times at which p is truth-valued. Since p is true at t_2 on h_0, omniscience entails that God knows p at t_1. Factivity then requires that p be true on every history agreeing with h_0 up to t_1. Thus p must be settled at t_1. The truth of p cannot vary across histories that share the past up to t_1.

Divine omnipotence requires that for any contingent event within God's causal reach, God retains at t_1 the power to bring about its occurrence or its non-occurrence at t_2. If E is contingent, then there must exist a history h'' such that h'' coincides with h_0 up to t_1 but at which p is false at t_2. This is required by the operator representing divine causal power, which demands that the proposition describing a contingent future event remain open at the earlier time if it is genuinely within the scope of divine alternatives.

Thus, omniscience requires that p be settled at t_1, while omnipotence requires that p be open at t_1. A branching-time model cannot satisfy both requirements simultaneously. Settledness requires that p has the same truth-value on all histories agreeing with h_0 up to t_1. Openness requires that p have different truth-values on at least two such histories. Therefore, the conjunction of these conditions is inconsistent.

This establishes the central theorem: no model incorporating temporal reality, factive omniscience over future contingents, and unrestricted divine causal alternatives can avoid contradiction. The incompatibility arises solely from the modal profiles imposed by the divine attributes and from the structure of time itself. It does not depend on creaturely freedom, epistemic limitations, or semantic assumptions beyond those introduced in the formal framework. The contradiction is a direct consequence of assigning both infallible knowledge and unrestricted causal power to the same agent relative to a temporally ordered domain.

The implications of the theorem are immediate. If omniscience is retained in its classical form, then later events must be settled relative to earlier times, and omnipotence must be restricted accordingly. If omnipotence is retained in its classical form, then later events must remain open relative to earlier times, and omniscience must be restricted. If temporal reality is denied, the conflict reappears atemporalized as a tension between the fixed truth-values of future propositions in a tenseless structure and the modal openness required by unrestricted divine power. The inconsistency is therefore not removable by adopting a tenseless or eternalist metaphysics.

This result forms the basis for the examination of classical and contemporary attempts to reconcile omniscience and omnipotence. The next section evaluates these proposals and shows why none succeeds in preserving the classical configuration of attributes within a temporally structured world.

Analysis of Major Counterarguments

The inconsistency established in the preceding section raises the question of whether modifications to the underlying metaphysical or theological assumptions might dissolve the conflict. This section evaluates the principal strategies developed in the philosophical literature to reconcile divine omniscience, divine omnipotence, and temporal reality. These strategies differ significantly in their metaphysical commitments, but all share the aim of preserving the classical conception of God as both all-knowing and all-powerful within a temporally ordered world. Each is examined here in its strongest form. None succeeds in avoiding the contradiction.

One prominent strategy appeals to divine timelessness. According to this view, God does not exist in time and therefore does not know future events in a temporally indexed way. Instead, God apprehends all events; past, present, and future, within a single timeless perspective. If God does not stand at an earlier moment relative to the future event, the argument goes, then God's knowledge cannot impose deterministic constraints at earlier

times. However, this response fails to address the modal structure that generates the contradiction. Even if God knows timelessly that an event occurs at t_2, the proposition describing that event is eternally true. If God possesses unrestricted causal power, God must be able to bring about a state of affairs that would render that proposition false. The tension therefore reappears as a conflict between the fixed truth-values of future-tense propositions in a timeless ontology and the modal openness required by omnipotence. The contradiction is atemporalized, not removed.

A second strategy holds that foreknowledge is non-causal. On this view, God's knowledge that an event will occur does not cause the event. If foreknowledge lacks causal force, then, it is claimed, it cannot constrain divine action. This response conflates causal dependence with logical consequence. The argument presented in this paper does not rely on the assumption that God's knowledge causes future events. The contradiction arises solely from the factivity of knowledge: if God knows p, then p must be true. If God retains unrestricted causal power, then p must remain open. Causation is irrelevant to this modal tension. Removing causal relations does nothing to alter the truth conditions of the proposition or its modal profile.

A third strategy invokes Molinism and the notion of middle knowledge. Molinism posits that God possesses knowledge of all counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and that God uses this knowledge to actualize a world whose history unfolds according to these counterfactuals. The proposal is that God can route around the modal conflict by selecting a world whose future is fully known without determining that future. However, even if the Molinist apparatus is granted, the contradiction reappears at a deeper level. If God knows which world God will actualize, this knowledge is infallible. The proposition describing the chosen world is settled prior to the actualization. Omnipotence would require that God retain the capacity to actualize a different world. Thus, the conflict relocates to God's own creative act: the proposition expressing which world God will actualize must be both settled and open. Molinism does not eliminate the contradiction; it repositions it.

A fourth strategy is open theism, which denies that propositions about future contingents have determinate truth-values prior to their occurrence. On this view, God knows all that can be known, but future contingents are not truth-valued and therefore not knowable. This avoids the contradiction by rejecting the classical definition of omniscience. It preserves divine freedom and temporal reality but at the cost of restricting divine knowledge. Open theism therefore confirms the structure of the trilemma rather than dissolving it: it chooses to reject classical omniscience in order to preserve omnipotence within a temporally open world. This is coherent but no longer classical.

A fifth strategy distinguishes between hard and soft facts about the future. The aim is to claim that God's foreknowledge concerns soft facts, which are not fixed in the same way as hard facts. If foreknowledge concerns soft facts, it is argued, then divine knowledge does not impose necessity on the future. However, this distinction is insufficient when applied to infallible knowledge. If God knows that an event will occur, the proposition expressing that event must be true. Whether the fact is classified as "soft" or "hard" does not alter its truth-value or its modal consequences. Soft facts do not escape the demands of factivity, and the modal conflict remains intact.

A final strategy appeals to the idea that God can transcend logical constraints. If God is not bound by logic, then perhaps God can both know that an event will occur and retain the power to prevent it. This proposal undermines the coherence of the very attributes it attempts to preserve. If God's knowledge need not conform to logic, the notion of infallibility is compromised. If God's power includes the ability to violate logic, then no meaningful modal analysis of divine action is possible. This response abandons the framework of rational theism rather than resolving the inconsistency.

In each case, the attempt to preserve the classical configuration of divine attributes confronts the same structural difficulty. Omniscience requires that propositions about future contingent events be settled at earlier times. Omnipotence requires that such propositions remain open. Temporal reality

requires that these conditions apply at specific temporal indices. No reinterpretation of foreknowledge, divine power, or temporal ontology examined in the literature succeeds in reconciling these demands without revising at least one of the classical commitments.

The next section articulates the resulting trilemma and examines its implications for the coherence of classical theism and the metaphysics of temporal reality.

The Trilemma and Its Implications

The central theorem demonstrates that the three classical commitments,absolute omniscience, absolute omnipotence, and temporal reality, cannot all be maintained together. The inconsistency does not depend on auxiliary assumptions about causation, human freedom, epistemic accessibility, or the semantics of temporal discourse. It arises directly from the modal profiles that the divine attributes impose on propositions concerning the future in conjunction with the existence of earlier and later times. The result is a trilemma: any coherent model of divine agency within a temporally ordered world must reject or modify at least one of these commitments.

One route is to revise the notion of omniscience. If future contingent propositions lack determinate truth-values prior to their occurrence, then infallible knowledge of such propositions is neither required nor possible. Divine knowledge would then encompass all propositions with determinate truth-values, while propositions concerning future contingents would be excluded from the domain of knowledge. This approach preserves temporal openness and unrestricted divine causal power but abandons the classical thesis that omniscience includes exhaustive knowledge of all future contingent truths. Omniscience becomes maximal relative to an indeterministic metaphysics rather than absolute. This position aligns closely with open futurism and related accounts in the philosophy of time.

A second route is to restrict omnipotence. If omniscience is retained in its classical form, then the future becomes settled at earlier times, and divine causal power must conform to these settled truths. God would no longer have unrestricted alternative possibilities with respect to future contingents. Instead, divine action would be constrained by the determinate structure of future events as known infallibly at earlier times. Omnipotence becomes the ability to bring about any state of affairs compatible with God's infallible foreknowledge. This revision preserves exhaustive foreknowledge and temporal structure but at the cost of eliminating genuine divine alternative possibilities.

A third route is to deny temporal reality. If the future does not unfold in a temporally ordered manner and all events exist tenselessly within a fixed block, then the modal tension between omniscience and omnipotence emerges atemporalized rather than temporally indexed. Even in a tenseless ontology, the truth of future propositions is fixed, and unrestricted divine causal alternatives would conflict with that fixation. However, rejecting temporal reality changes the framework in which the conflict appears. Instead of arising at an earlier time relative to a later event, the conflict arises between the eternal truth of future-tense propositions and the requirement that divine causal power accommodate genuine modal alternatives. The contradiction remains, but its temporal structure is removed. This option preserves the classical definitions of omniscience and omnipotence only in a formal sense while eliminating the temporal context that made their interplay problematic.

These three options correspond to deep metaphysical divisions. The first aligns with an indeterministic metaphysics of time in which the future is ontologically open; the second with a deterministic structure in which divine agency is modally constrained; and the third with an eternalist ontology in which temporal becoming is eliminated. What unifies these options is that each abandons at least one of the commitments central to classical theism in its traditional form.

The trilemma is therefore not a contingent feature of any particular theological model but a structural feature of the modal logic of divine attributes. Any

attempt to preserve all three commitments must either compromise the factivity of knowledge, alter the semantics of temporal propositions, or reinterpret omnipotence so as to remove its modal openness. Such revisions move away from the classical conception of a being whose knowledge is infallible, whose power is unrestricted, and who acts within a temporally ordered reality.

This trilemma has broader implications for perfect being theology. The classical view holds that God possesses the maximal set of great-making properties. The result established here shows that the intuitive maximal set is not a consistent set. The maximal compossible set of attributes must exclude at least one of the three commitments. Thus, perfect being reasoning must incorporate not only evaluative considerations about the greatness of divine attributes but also modal coherence constraints.

The trilemma also clarifies why the debate over divine foreknowledge and freedom has persisted across centuries. Different positions in the debate typically select one limb of the trilemma and reject or reinterpret the others. Deterministic models retain omniscience and temporal reality while restricting omnipotence; open theism retains omnipotence and temporal reality while restricting omniscience; timeless or atemporal models retain omniscience and omnipotence while rejecting temporal becoming. Each of these positions represents a coherent response to the contradiction but none preserves the entire classical configuration.

The next section considers the broader metaphysical implications of these options and examines how each revision reshapes the understanding of divine attributes, temporal ontology, and the structure of modality.

Implications for Classical Theism and Metaphysics

The trilemma established in the preceding section has significant consequences for the coherence of classical theism and for the metaphysics of time. The impossibility of jointly maintaining absolute omniscience, absolute omnipotence, and temporal reality requires a systematic reevaluation of how these attributes can be coherently instantiated.

If absolute omniscience is revised, divine knowledge becomes relative to the subset of propositions that are determinate at a given time. The metaphysics of the future is consequently constrained: contingent events are not truth-valued prior to their occurrence, and the temporal unfolding of reality retains modal openness. Divine omnipotence can be exercised without contradiction, but classical omniscience is abandoned. This revision aligns with open-futurist models, in which the future is genuinely indeterminate, and the domain of knowable truths expands only as events occur. Such a position preserves the sense of temporal becoming and the full exercise of divine causal power while relinquishing the classical claim of exhaustive foreknowledge.

If absolute omnipotence is revised, the scope of divine action is restricted by the settledness of future-tense propositions. Omniscience and temporal reality remain intact, but God's power to bring about alternative futures is constrained by the determinate status of events at earlier times. In this model, divine freedom is modal rather than absolute: God cannot bring about propositions whose truth has been fixed by omniscience. The implication is a form of theological determinism in which God's choices conform to the structure of necessary truths derived from prior knowledge. This preserves the classical understanding of omniscience but modifies the conception of omnipotence, constraining the divine agency traditionally associated with maximal power.

If temporal reality is revised, the temporal structure in which the conflict arises is eliminated. Omniscience and omnipotence can be retained in their classical forms, but the resulting ontology is tenseless. All events, past, present, and future, exist simultaneously in a static block universe. The temporal asymmetry between knowledge and action disappears, but the modal tension persists: propositions about events are fixed and true, while divine power still demands the possibility of alternative outcomes. Rejecting temporal reality thereby preserves the classical attributes formally but at the cost of eliminating temporal becoming and the

explanatory framework of temporal causation. Divine agency is reconceived in tenseless terms, and the notion of doing otherwise must be understood in a non-temporal modality.

These revisions demonstrate that the classical configuration of divine attributes cannot be maintained without sacrificing at least one central commitment. The structural nature of the inconsistency implies that the revision is not a matter of interpretive ingenuity but a necessary consequence of the modal logic of divine attributes. Perfect being theology, which aims to ascribe maximal excellence to God, must therefore consider modal coherence alongside evaluative criteria when determining which attributes are essential and which may be revised.

The trilemma also clarifies the relationship between divine attributes and metaphysical frameworks. Models that preserve omniscience and temporal reality while restricting omnipotence align with deterministic metaphysics. Models that preserve omnipotence and temporal reality while restricting omniscience align with indeterministic or open-future metaphysics. Models that preserve both omniscience and omnipotence at the cost of temporal reality align with tenseless or eternalist metaphysics. Each option entails significant conceptual and ontological shifts, illustrating that debates over foreknowledge, freedom, and temporal structure are manifestations of deeper modal constraints.

Finally, the analysis emphasizes that the incompatibility does not arise from limitations in human understanding or from epistemic contingencies. It is a consequence of the logical structure of the attributes themselves, the modal conditions they impose, and the existence of temporal differentiation. Any coherent theistic model must therefore explicitly choose which commitment to revise, and the choice will have profound implications for the interpretation of divine agency, the metaphysics of time, and the structure of modality in a theistic framework.

Conclusion

This paper has examined whether the classical theistic attributes of omniscience and omnipotence can be jointly instantiated within a temporally structured world. Using a branching-time framework equipped with operators for divine knowledge and divine causal power, the analysis demonstrated that these attributes impose incompatible modal requirements on propositions concerning future contingent events. Omniscience requires that such propositions be settled at earlier times if they are true; omnipotence requires that they remain open. Temporal reality ensures that these conflicting modal conditions must apply at specific temporal indices. The result is a contradiction that arises independently of any considerations involving human free will, epistemic access, divine timelessness, or causal relations.

The evaluation of classical and contemporary responses showed that none succeeds in eliminating the underlying inconsistency. Strategies invoking timelessness, non-causal foreknowledge, Molinist middle knowledge, open futurism, soft fact distinctions, or appeals to divine transcendence of logic either reproduce the structural conditions that generate the contradiction or abandon at least one of the classical commitments. The inconsistency is therefore not contingent on a particular interpretation of divine cognition or action; it follows from the formal interaction of factive omniscience, unrestricted causal alternatives, and temporal succession.

These findings yield a trilemma: any consistent view must reject or revise at least one of the following, absolute omniscience, absolute omnipotence, or temporal reality. Each revision carries substantial metaphysical implications. Rejecting absolute omniscience aligns with an indeterministic future in which propositions about contingent events lack determinate truth-values until their occurrence. Rejecting absolute omnipotence constrains divine agency to conform with the determinate structure of future events known at earlier times. Rejecting temporal reality eliminates temporal becoming in favor of a tenseless ontology in which the modal tension persists atemporalized. No option preserves the classical configuration unaltered.

The broader implications of this result extend to perfect being theology and the metaphysical foundations of divine attributes. If the intuitive maximal set of great-making properties is not modally compossible, then perfection must be understood in terms of coherent maximality rather than intuitive maximality. Any adequate theological model must therefore navigate the trilemma by articulating a coherent set of divine attributes consistent with the modal structure of temporal reality or by abandoning temporal becoming in favor of a tenseless framework.

The analysis presented here does not prescribe which limb of the trilemma should be relinquished. Instead, it clarifies the logical space of options and identifies the constraints that any coherent theistic model must satisfy. The inconsistency at issue is not semantic or epistemic but structural and modal. Its resolution requires substantive revision of at least one central commitment of classical theism. Future work may explore the constructive implications of each limb of the trilemma and investigate how revised models of divine attributes can be integrated with broader metaphysical theories of time, modality, and causation.

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